

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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MOST WHOOPER EGGS ARE HATCHING SUCCESSFULLY; NEW RECORD IN CAPTIVITY

Seven of 11 whooping crane eggs taken from the Canadian wilds in May for incubating at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland have hatched successfully, the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The achievement brings the number of captive whoopers to a record 26, but the figure may soon be increased if the remaining three eggs, still in incubation, hatch in coming days. One of the whoopers that hatched died of an intestinal infection shortly after birth.

This was the fourth expedition to the cranes' summer nesting grounds in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park in search of eggs--others were made in 1967, 1968 and 1969. Canadian and United States wildlife officials who are cooperating in these ventures hope to build flocks of these endangered birds so that some of their descendants may be returned to the wild. At present, there are 57 whoopers, North America's tallest bird, left in the wild.

Ray C. Erickson, assistant director at Patuxent, and Glen Smart, chief of the Center's endangered species propagation section, went on the egg-gathering mission which was aided by Canadian wildlife biologist Ernie Kuyt. The pickups were made on May 20.

The men traveled to the nesting area by helicopter. As in past missions, Kuyt left the helicopter, carefully approached a nest, took an egg and put it in a protective woolen stocking. He then carried it to the helicopter where Erickson and Smart were waiting with portable incubators.

The disturbance was only temporary for the mother crane. She stood nearby and returned quickly to the nest to protect the remaining egg. Biologists point out that, even though nests usually contain two eggs, whooping cranes are inclined to rear only a single offspring in the wild.

Of the captive whoopers, 21 are at Patuxent, three at Audubon Park Zoo in New Orleans, and two at San Antonio Zoo. Twelve of the total came from the earlier egg pickups.

The other newly hatched whoopers are reported in good health. They are receiving scientifically formulated diets and are being kept in carefully regulated pens.